

**Child Welfare Improvement Committee  
Indiana Court Improvement Program**

**Minutes**

**May 6, 2016**

**10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

1. Members present. Magistrate Heather Mollo (chair), Magistrate Deborah Domine, Magistrate Andrew Roesener, Cathy Graham, Nancy Fisher.
2. Staff present. Angela Reid-Brown and Matthew Hagenbush.
3. Guests present. Jane Bisbee and Sarah Sparks, Department of Child Services
4. Welcome and Introductions. Committee members introduced themselves. Magistrate Mollo noted that the committee's long term goal was to move into the role of subject matter experts for juvenile courts to consult on child welfare issues.
5. Approval of Minutes from March 4, 2016 meeting. The minutes from the March 4, 2016 meeting were approved by consensus.
6. DCS Case Transfer When Permanency Plan is Adoption. Jane Bisbee presented on DCS' recent implementation of a plan to transfer cases waiting for adoption from overloaded Family Case Managers to their immediate supervisors. DCS began this initiative in late February, and it affected nearly 700 cases. The decision to implement this plan was made by Bisbee and Director Mary Beth Bonaventura. Cases that were moved all had termination of parental rights completed, the children were in their pre-adoptive homes, and were awaiting final hearing on their adoption.

As a result of the recent increase in CHINS filings, many case managers were simply overloaded and did not have the necessary time to push the parties to resolution of these cases. The plan was intended to move the cases forward in the adoption process, as stable post-adoption cases sometimes got less attention in favor of putting out fires in other ongoing cases. Delay in these cases is also partially attributable to docket congestion in some courts. In other situations, pre-adoptive parents have dragged their feet in completing the adoption requirements.

The supervisors are being paid overtime to handle the transferred cases. To date, the plan has been successful in expediting adoption in many of these cases, and has not resulted in any placement disruptions. 187 adoption cases have reached permanency under this plan from its inception to April 30th

This initiative, however, does not constitute a change in DCS policy or general procedure. DCS policy is to keep the same ongoing Family Case Manager throughout the case, although turnover generally makes that practice impracticable. The initiative to transfer cases to DCS supervisors is only intended to be temporary in response to the increase in CHINS cases and Family Case Manager caseloads. The targeted completion date of this initiative is July 2016.

Magistrate Mollo asked about the dynamics of transferring complicated cases and gave an example of a transferred case in her court where two siblings were in pre-adoptive homes, but the third was not able to be placed in the same home because of that child's specific issues. Bisbee emphasized the importance of keeping sibling groups together and stated that DCS sometimes has to make the difficult decision of whether to hold up permanency for children on the basis of a sibling's issue.

Magistrate Domine expressed concern about the lost rapport that an FCM develops with the children they work with. If supervisors take over for FCMs, does that lost rapport lead to worse overall outcomes for the children? Bisbee noted that the new policy does not prevent FCMs from having contact with the children on those cases, even if they have been transferred off the case.

Magistrate Mollo noted this committee's focus on the population of legal orphans and ways to increase positive outcomes for that population. Bisbee was unaware of the committee's focus on that issue. Bisbee believes that the committee's efforts dovetail with DCS' efforts on this group of children. Bisbee stated that DCS believes that population to be around 600-800 children. DCS is looking nationally for innovative solutions to aid this population in reaching permanency, and has examined the Georgia Cold Case Project, which the committee has previously discussed. DCS currently has 2 employees on staff to mine these cases, searching for previously unknown relatives or other creative permanency options where none have been uncovered. DCS also has a committee dedicated to this population, including high-ranking DCS personnel from different areas of the agency.

Matthew Hagenbush asked what could be done to move cases to adoption faster. Bisbee acknowledged the problem of being unable to control the timeline of the appellate process in termination cases. DCS has been working to minimize the time taken to negotiate adoption subsidies. Bisbee could give no target number for how long those negotiations should ideally take, but DCS has been tracking the timeframe of negotiations. Bisbee is speaking at the May meeting of the Commission to Improve the Status of Children on adoptions and DCS' efforts to facilitate them.

Nancy Fisher asked about the availability of CHINS 6 and whether it had any effect on kids with mental health issues creating failed adoptions. Bisbee believed CHINS 6 is unnecessary, given that DCS regularly uses the standard neglect CHINS with no substantiation of neglect against the adoptive parent to file cases in this matter. Effectively, such a case approximates a CHINS 6 but does not blame the child for the child's condition.

Angela Reid-Brown explained the committee's plan to hold a collaborative conference on legal orphans on May 26, 2017, and Bisbee expressed that she would be happy to help collaborate on that topic.

7. Other Matters. Cathy Graham distributed a handout on federal Title IV-B funding where comment is being sought on several issues related to that funding's reauthorization and what the funding may be used for.

Future meeting dates:

- July 1, 2016
- September 2, 2016
- November 4, 2016